

THE DODO.

Our engraving, which is copied from a painting in the British Museum, represents a bird, of the existence of whose species a little more than two centuries ago there appears to be no doubt, but which is now supposed to be entirely extinct. It must be obvious that such a fact offers some of the most interesting and important considerations; and the subject, therefore, has claimed the particular attention of several distinguished naturalists. The most complete view of the evidence as to the recent existence of the Dodo is given in a paper, by Mr. Duncan, of New College, Oxford, which is printed in the twelfth number of the Zoological Journal. To this valuable article we are indebted for much of the following account.

The painting in the British Museum was presented to that institution by the late Mr. George Edwards; and the history of it is thus given in his work on birds:—

“The original picture from which this print of the Dodo is engraved, was drawn in Holland, from the living bird, brought from St. Maurice's Island, in the East Indies, in the early times of the discovery of the Indies, by the way of the Cape of Good Hope. It (the picture) was the property of the late Sir Hans Sloane, to the time of his death; and afterwards becoming my property, I deposited it in the British Museum as a great curiosity. The above history of the picture I had from Sir Hans Sloane, and the late Dr. Mortimer, Secretary of the Royal Society.”

The evidence of the former existence of this bird does not, however, entirely rest upon this picture and its traditionary history; for if it were so, it would be easier to imagine that the artist had invented the representation of some unknown creature, than that the species should have so utterly become lost within so comparatively short a time. There are three other representations of the Dodo which may be called original; for they are given in very early printed books, and are evidently not copied one from the other, although they each agree in representing the sort of hood on the head, the eye placed in a bare skin extending to the beak, the curved and swelling neck, the short heavy body, the small wings, the stumpy legs and diverted claws, and the tuft of rump feathers.

The first of these pictures is given in a Latin work by Clusius, entitled “*Caroli Clusii Exoticorum*,” lib. v., printed in 1605. He says that his figure is taken from a rough sketch in a journal of a Dutch voyager, who had seen the bird in a voyage to the Moluccas, in 1598; and that he himself had seen, at Leyden, a leg of the Dodo, brought from the Mauritius.

The second representation is in Herbert's *Travels*, published in 1634. We subjoin his description of the bird, which is very quaint and curious:—

“The Dodo comes first to our description, here, and in Dygarrois; (and no where else, that ever I could see or heare of, is generated the Dodo.) (A Portuguese name it is, and has reference to her simpleness,) a bird which for shape and rareness might be called a Phoenix (wer't in Arabia;) her body is round and extreame fat, her slow pace begets that corpulencie; few of them weigh lesse than fifty pound; better to the eye than the stomach; greasie appetites might perhaps commend them, but to the indifferently curious nourishment, but prove offensive. Let's take her picture; her visage darts forth melancholy, as sensible of nature's injurie in framing so great and massie a body to be directed by such small and complementall wings, as are unable to hoise her from the ground, serving only to prove her a bird; which otherwise might be doubted of; her head is variously drest, the one halfe hooded with downy blackish feathers; the other, perfectly naked; of a whitish hue, as if a transparent lawne had covered it; her bill is very howked and bends downwards, the thrill or breathing place is in the midst of it; from which part to the end, the colour is a light Greene mixt with a pale yellow; her eyes be round and small, and bright as diamonds; her cloathing is of finest downe, such as you see in goslings; her trayne is (like a China beard) of three or four short feathers; her legs thick, and black, and strong; her tallons or pounces sharp, her stomach fiery hot, so as stones and iron are easily digested in it; in that and shape, not a little resembling the Africk Oestriches; but so much, as for their more certain difference I dare to give thee (with two others) her representation.”

In this description there are several details that are no doubt inaccurate; such as the iron-

digesting stomach; but the more important particulars agree with other evidence.

The third representation of the Dodo is in Willughby's Ornithology, published about the end of the seventeenth century; and this figure is taken from one given in a Latin work on the natural and medical history of the East Indies, published by Jacob Bontius, in 1658. This figure exactly agrees with that of the picture in the British Museum. Our great naturalist Ray, who published, in 1676 and 1688, editions of Willughby's work, says, "We have seen this bird dried, or its skin stuffed, in Tradescant's cabinet."

Tradescant was a person who had a very curious museum at Lambeth, and in his printed catalogue we find the following item:—Sect. 5, *Whole Birds*. Dodar, from the island Mauritius; it is not able to fly, being so big." Tradescant's specimen afterwards passed into the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, where it is described as existing in 1700; but having become decayed, was destroyed by an order of the visitors in 1755. There is a beak, however, and a leg still preserved in the Ashmolean Museum; and there is a foot also in the British Museum, which was formerly in the Museum of the Royal Society. We are informed, by an eminent naturalist, that the foot at Oxford is much shorter, and otherwise much smaller, than the one in the British Museum, which shows that there must have been two specimens in this country.

Of the former existence, therefore, of the Dodo, there appears to be no reasonable doubt; although the representations and descriptions of the bird may, in many respects, be inaccurate. Mr. Duncan, in answer to an application upon the subject made to a gentleman at Port Louis, in the Mauritius, learnt that there is a very general impression among the inhabitants that the Dodo did exist at Rodriguez, as well as in the Mauritius itself; but that the oldest inhabitants have never seen it, nor has any specimen, or part of a specimen, been procured in those islands.

Mr. Lyell states, in the second volume of his Principles of Geology, that M. Cuvier had showed him, in Paris, a collection of fossil bones, discovered under a bed of lava in the Isle of France, amongst which were some remains of the Dodo, which left no doubt in the mind of this great naturalist that this bird was

of the gallinaceous tribe; that is, of the same tribe as the common domestic fowl, the turkey and the peacock.

In a paper "on the natural affinities that connect the orders and families of birds," published in the Transactions of the Linnean Society, the following observations occur on the Dodo:—

"Considerable doubts have arisen as to the present existence of the Linnean *Didus* (Dodo:) and they have been increased by the consideration of the numberless opportunities that have lately occurred of ascertaining the existence of these birds in those situations, the Isles of Mauritius and Bourbon, where they were originally alleged to have been found. That they once existed, I believe, cannot be questioned. Besides the descriptions given by voyagers of undoubted authority, the relics of a specimen preserved in the public repository of this country bear decisive record of the fact. The most probable supposition that we can form on this subject is, that the race has become extinct in the before-mentioned islands, in consequence of the value of the bird as an article of food to the earlier settlers, and its incapability of escaping from pursuit. This conjecture is strengthened by the consideration of the gradual decrease of a nearly conterminous group, the *Otis tarda* (Bustard.) of our British ornithology, which, from similar causes, we have every reason to suspect will shortly be lost to this country. We may, however, still entertain some hopes that the *Didus* may be recovered in the South-eastern part of that vast continent, hitherto so little explored, which adjoins those islands, and whence, indeed, it seems to have been originally imported into them."

The agency of man, in limiting the increase of the inferior animals, and in extirpating certain races, was perhaps never more strikingly exemplified than in the case of the Dodo. That a species so remarkable in its character should become extinct, within little more than two centuries, so that the fact of its existence at all has been doubted, is a circumstance which may well excite our surprise, and lead us to a consideration of similar changes which are still going on from the same cause. These changes in our own country, where the rapid progress of civilization has compelled man to make incessant war upon many species that gave him offence, or that afforded him food or clothing,

are sufficiently remarkable. The beaver was a native of our rivers in the time of the Anglo-Saxons; but, being eagerly pursued for its fur, had become scarce at the end of the ninth century, just in the same way as the species is now becoming scarce in North America. In the twelfth century its destruction was nearly complete. The wolf is extirpated, although it existed in Scotland at the end of the seventeenth century. The last bear perished in Scotland in 1057. In Isaac Walton's *Angler*, published soon after the time of Charles I., we have a dialogue between the angler and a hunter of otters—a citizen who walked into the neighborhood of Tottenham, to chase the animals in the small rivers of Middlesex. How rarely is an otter now found! The wild cat and the badger are seldom discovered, although they were formerly common;—the wild boar is never

heard of. The eagle is now scarcely to be seen, except in the wildest fastnesses of the Highlands;—and the crane, the egret, and the stork, who were once the undisturbed tenants of the marshes with which the country was covered, are fled before the progress of cultivation. A single Bustard (already mentioned) is now rarely found; they were formerly common in our downs and heaths, in flocks of forty or fifty. The wood grouse, which about fifty years ago were the tenants of the pine-forests of Scotland and Ireland, are utterly destroyed. Facts such as these may show us that the recent existence, and the supposed extirpation of the Dodo, may be supported by well-known examples in our own country.—*Penny Magazine*.



THE DODO.—FROM A PAINTING IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM.